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ABSTRACT

A college human relations course is described and evaluated, and the change and rate of change in students' attitudes toward self and others is examined. One hundred and sixty students of different backgrounds who were enrolled in five sections of a human relations course answered questions concerning self-concept and attitudes toward various ethnic, socioeconomic, and racial groups. Substantial change was found in attitude toward self, with little change evidenced in attitude toward others. The evaluation is noted, as are nonstatistical information gleaned through course due to the evaluation are noted, as are nonstatistical information gleaned through the study and indications of the attractiveness of the course to students. (MJB)

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A Human Relations Course: Does it Make a Difference?

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Objectives

The recent upsurge in the public's interest in the non-cognitive aspects of their lives has been reflected in the increasing number of college courses offered for credit in the area of human, intrapersonal and/or interpersonal relations. This study attempted to assess the attitudes of those students who elect such a course and what changes in attitudes are evident at the end of the course. In other words, the purposes of the study were:

- A. To determine attitudes of the students toward themselves and toward other groups which are racially, ethnically, and religiously different.
- B. To ascertain whether or not any change in attitudes towards these different groups occurred and the degree of change, as a result of students' participation in the course: "Introduction to Human Relations."
- C. To examine the level of self-concept of students taking the course and to note any change in perception of themselves and their self-concepts.

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Perspective

A variety of approaches have been promoted as effective ways to influence student attitudes. The methods advocated range from a strict cognitive learning model to a completely non-cognitive or affective domain approach. The approach employed in this study was eclectic, somewhere between the two extremes. The attitudes that were of immediate concern were those held by the students concerning themselves and their attitudes towards various members of society. More specifically, the course was focused on attitudes towards various religious, racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups.

Data Source

The main source of data was the responses of 160 college students enrolled in five sections of a human relations course. The students completed two likert type questionnaires, one, a 30 item scale asking questions about an individual's feelings about himself, and the other, a 26 item scale dealing with the student's attitudes towards various ethnic, socio-economic and racial groups. The students were representatives of various academic disciplines, ethnic identities, sexes, and classes (fresh., soph., etc.).

Methods and Procedures

Of the six sections of the course, one instructor taught four sections and the other, two. The three credit course was offered on a semester long basis with class meetings twice a week. The teaching strategies ranged from formal lectures to informal student dialogue and interpersonal experiences which were related both orally and in writing. The students completed the two instruments during the first class meeting and again, at the last class

meeting. The student responses were collected on IBM answer sheets and processed. The resulting data were subjected to item analysis as well as the employment of the t-test to ascertain the probability that any observed differences between the pre and post test responses were greater than would be expected by chance alone.

The comparison of the students' responses to the pre and post survey instruments did reveal some significant shifts in attitudes. The changes noted, however, were mostly on the questionnaires dealing with the student's attitudes about him or herself. Little shift was noted in the responses concerning their attitudes towards various groups. The item analysis of the two instruments revealed that both instruments had quite high reliability as evidenced by KR-21 values in the .90's.

The two questionnaires, one asking opinions students held about other individuals and groups, the other asking students about feelings about themselves, did not show similar results. The "introspective" questionnaire did not exhibit a significant shift in overall score. On the basis of these results, it appears that although the students did change the way they felt about themselves, there was not a shift in their view of others as evidenced by their responses to the other questionnaire.

Summary of Survey Results

Pretest		Post test			
Mean	S.D.		Mean	S.D.	
Questionnaire A	- 41.40	7.52	40.95	8.2	
Questionnaire B	- 105.54	19.48	110.71	23.47	(sig. at .01 level)

Discussion

The students attending this course were a cross section of the student population. It should be noted, however, that this is an elective course and there were no controls to insure that no biases were influencing the selection of this course. It cannot be assumed that these students were representative of the student body. It could as easily be assumed that in electing this course, the students were from a specific subpopulation. The students were from essentially a metropolitan environment. The course focused on an introduction to and a deepening of understanding of the ideas and principles related to a concept of human relationships in an metropolitan environment. The experiences in the course were designed to provide an opportunity, both for intensive self-awareness activities in which students focused on such skills as building trust and improving communication, as well as a critical examination and evaluation of the existing structures and social dimensions of the existing structures of the various groups which comprise this metropolitan area. Students were to draw upon and use their own experiences for class discussion and papers, as well as in practical applications and testing in laboratory experiences.

It is recognized that the basis for evaluation of the changes in the students is the "subjective" self-report. It is entirely possible the responses to the questionnaires reflect perceived desirable answers and not the probable actual behavior or beliefs. Another limitation is the mix of students of various racial, sexual identity or ethnicity groups in the various sections. Across the sections there was no standard "mix".

Educational Significance

- A. One of the significant outcomes of this study was the revision of the present course, "Introduction to Human Relations," and

the development of a follow-up course. This course was approved by the College Curriculum Committee and was offered for the first time in the Fall 1978 semester.

- B. We have been able to gather some information and data on an informal basis from the students as to their feelings about the usefulness of the course, "Introduction to Human Relations," in their daily lives. These data are gathered through conversations with the students, their logs which were anecdotal records of their perceptions of their own feelings, attitudes, frustrations, and self-concept, and changes that occurred in their opinions, beliefs, and value systems. Although this information is not statistically measureable in the state in which it was collected, nevertheless, there is strong indication and support to conclude that this course does contribute significantly to a better understanding by the students of themselves and their life styles.
- C. Other indications of the course's acceptance are:
 - 1. An increase in the number of students recommending the course as a good course to take.
 - 2. The Dean of Students has recommended this course for the borderline students that are accepted at Towson State University.
 - 3. An increase in the number of students who elect to follow through and take the advanced course.
 - 4. An increase in the number of students who recommend the course because it helps them feel comfortable with themselves and helps them meet new friends.

The increasing number of institutions offering courses such as this one suggests the importance of developing methods, procedures, and experience in

evaluating such courses. This paper describes one such course and attempts to evaluate it. This information would be useful to others with similar needs.

QUESTIONNAIRE A

Indicate whether you agree (A) or disagree (B) with each of the following statements.

1. ☐ A lot of people who are unemployed just don't want to work.
2. ☐ Sometimes poor people engage in illegal activities because they have no choice.
3. ☐ Most poor people really try to keep their homes clean.
4. ☐ Most people on welfare probably could get along all right without it if they had to.
5. ☐ Poor people are as honest as people who aren't poor.
6. ☐ In general, if a person is poor, it's probably his own fault.
7. ☐ Being on welfare is nothing to be ashamed of.
8. ☐ If a person is poor, it's probably because he never had the opportunities that other people have.
9. ☐ Poor people make their own slums.
10. ☐ Poverty is no excuse for breaking the law.
11. ☐ Poor people generally have low moral standards.
12. ☐ Poor people are as hard working and ambitious as anyone else.
13. ☐ Tremendous progress has been made in the field of civil rights and the need now is to consolidate the gains made.
14. ☐ The schools should be more active in planning programs to help reduce the growing rate of illegitimacy.
15. ☐ Special consideration in employment, promotion, and finances should be given to those who have been victims of discrimination in the past.
16. ☐ Busing should be used to achieve integration of public education.
17. ☐ State funds should not be used to help alleviate the financial plight of parochial and other private schools.
18. ☐ Most compensatory programs designed to raise intelligence and achievement levels of the children of the poor are failures and should be discontinued.
19. ☐ The program of admission of high risk students to colleges (students who do not meet the traditional college entrance requirements) is a costly one with relatively few successes.

QUESTIONNAIRE A

20. ____ The Supreme Court decision relating to the use of prayers in the public schools should be reversed.
21. ____ Science has proved that one race is superior to another.
22. ____ I believe that black families have different values than white families.
23. ____ I believe that most of the money in the world is controlled by Jewish people.
24. ____ There is a high percentage of Italians in the crime world.
25. ____ A large percentage of Irish are alcoholics.
26. ____ I feel uneasy in the presence of someone different from me racially.

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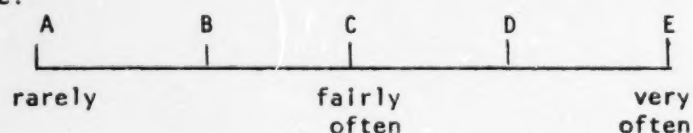
Introduction to Human Relations

Date _____

Directions:

1. Read each statement carefully. Then decide to what extent the statement accurately describes you as you are now. Choose a letter value on the scale which best shows how you feel now; Indicate your choice in the appropriate block provided on the answer sheet.

Example:



	<u>Now</u>
	<u>1</u>
1. I feel I can understand others	_____
2. I feel I can draw others out	_____
3. I feel I can listen attentively	_____
4. I feel I can note tension in a group	_____
5. I feel I can sense the feelings of individuals	_____
6. I feel I can note who is being "left out"	_____
7. I feel I can note reaction to my comments	_____
8. I feel I can ask for ideas and opinions	_____
9. I feel I can evaluate ideas critically	_____
10. I feel I can clarify issues	_____
11. I feel I can reduce tension in myself	_____
12. I feel I can reduce tension in others	_____
13. I feel I can uphold rights of individuals in the face of group pressure	_____

14. I feel I can express praise or appreciation _____
15. I feel I can accept compliments or praise _____
16. I feel I can disagree openly _____
17. I feel I can criticize others constructively _____
18. I feel I can express warm feelings _____
19. I feel I can express anger _____
20. I feel I can understand why I do what I do _____
21. I feel I can encourage comments _____
22. I feel I can accept help willingly _____
23. I feel I can criticize myself _____
24. I feel I can accept criticism from others _____
25. I feel I can stick my neck out in relations with others by
stating an unpopular point of view _____
26. I feel I can live in terms of my wants and likes _____
27. I feel I can be alone and not be uncomfortable _____
28. I feel that I know my strengths _____
29. I feel that I know my weaknesses or faults _____
30. I feel that I am willing to work on my faults or weaknesses _____